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Collaborative Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers in Scotland: aspirations, opportunities and barriers

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Abstract

This paper explores stakeholders' views on the desirability of collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) and examines potential barriers. It draws on two projects which each explore perceptions of CPD for teachers in Scotland. The data include interviews with key informants and with practising teachers as well as survey data from year 2-6 teachers. Analysis of data reveals an aspirational view of collaborative CPD, yet some of the data also reveal a pragmatic, occupational approach to CPD where the structure of the CPD framework is seen as fixed and not conducive to collaborative endeavour.

The data are analysed with reference to the triple lens framework (Fraser et al. 2007) which offers a composite framework for understanding teacher learning. The analysis is considered in relation to both the growing literature on collaborative CPD and the current policy context in Scotland, drawing out key messages of relevance to wider European and international contexts.

Keywords: teacher learning, collaborative CPD,

Introduction

The notion of collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) is increasing in popularity and recent research suggests that it can be more effective than individual CPD, especially when undertaken over a period of time rather than in a one-off session (Cordingley 2005). However, many countries worldwide, including Scotland, have adopted standards-based CPD frameworks which measure individual competence against set descriptors, but measuring the value of collaborative CPD in an individualised way is a real challenge. Added to this is the likelihood that a lot of the value of collaborative CPD is to be found in the informal element of working with other people; even harder to capture in competence-based descriptions of teaching standards. This paper explores these internationally relevant issues from a Scottish perspective, drawing on two recent research projects: one looking at teachers as learners across the entire career phase, and the other focusing on CPD needs in the second to sixth years of teaching.

In analysing the data the paper draws on the 'triple lens framework' (Fraser et al. 2007) as a means of better understanding the purpose and potential impact of CPD. This model offers a composite framework for thinking about teacher learning, drawing on three different ways of understanding CPD:

1. Bell and Gilbert's (1996) three aspects of professional learning (amended)
2. Kennedy's (2005) framework for analysing models of CPD
3. Reid's quadrants of teacher learning (See Fraser et al. 2007)

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The combined insight that can be gained by using these three different lenses to examine CPD is more nuanced, multidimensional and hence more appropriate to the complex nature of professional learning than any one of these frameworks alone can provide. More detailed discussion of the framework can be found in Fraser et al. (2007), but the distinctiveness and significance of each of the three ‘lenses’ is outlined in Table 1 below:

[Insert Table 1 here]

Collaborative CPD

‘Collaborative CPD’ can cover a number of activities ranging from working together with colleagues in informal, unplanned ways to structured, more formalised ‘communities of enquiry’ or ‘learning communities’. What all forms of collaborative CPD have in common is the value placed on the learning stimulated by working with others. In this sense collaborative CPD has the capacity to satisfy all three of Bell and Gilbert’s (1996) dimensions of professional learning: personal, social and occupational. While the features and conditions of the different types of collaborative learning vary, the one thing they have in common is that the learning is viewed as being socially-situated and not an individual isolated activity.

Bolam et al. (2005) were commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) to identify the characteristics of effective professional learning communities in schools. They identified eight characteristics which they argue must all be present in effective professional learning communities: ‘shared values and vision; collective responsibility for pupils’ learning; collaboration focused on learning; individual and collective professional learning; reflective professional enquiry; openness, networks and partnerships; inclusive membership; mutual trust, respect and support’ (p. i). The emphasis in this list appears to be two-fold: (1) learning is the central focus of activity, and (2) good relationships are seen as fundamental to providing conditions for effective learning. The centrality of relationships to the process moves it away from a transmissive information-giving activity to a potentially much more transformative process (Kennedy 2005).

The value of sustained and collaborative professional learning was the focus of a systematic review carried out by Cordingley et al. (2005). The review team compared evidence about the impact of individual and sustained CPD interventions with evidence about the impact on teaching and learning of collaborative and sustained CPD interventions. Collaborative CPD was shown to have much more impact on teaching and learning and was also shown to encourage teacher commitment and ownership of CPD. Bolam and Weindling’s (2006) synthesis of twenty research projects also highlights the importance of teacher agency in effective CPD. Their synthesis also concluded that effective CPD often includes supportive processes such as coaching, mentoring and collaborative working, again foregrounding the importance of the social element in teacher development. However, the social element alone is not sufficient, and Cordingley et al. (2005) suggest that CPD which incorporates active experimentation connected to teachers’ own classroom context is most effective; encompassing Bell and Gilbert’s (1996) ‘occupational’ dimension as well as the personal and social dimensions.

In their tentative conclusions, Cordingley et al. (2005) go as far as to suggest that group size makes a difference to the effectiveness of collaborative CPD, suggesting that optimum effectiveness takes place when pairs or small groups of teachers work together as opposed to large numbers. This links to the earlier

suggestion that the focus of the CPD needs to be both personally and contextually relevant, and the larger the group, the more diverse the range of personal interest and classroom contexts is likely to be.

Rhodes, Nevill, and Allan (2005) point to the particular significance of collaborative CPD in the early professional development stage, arguing that it contributes significantly to the shaping of professional identity. They warn that ‘for NQTs [newly qualified teachers] working in schools with an impoverished culture of collaboration and with little access to networking, it is reasonable to assume that the transition to an understanding of professional self will be harder to achieve’ (p. 348). Their reference to ‘culture of collaboration’ suggests that informal and unplanned collaborative CPD is a key part of the development of professional identity. This is something that is not always easily identified and accounted for within standards-based systems of CPD, especially those standards and related processes which lead to confirmed registration/licensing.

Wilson et al. (2008) researched a number of diverse communities of enquiry in which researchers, policy makers and practitioners came together to work on issues of common interest, and they identified similar sets of characteristics to those identified by Bolam et al. (2005), asserting that ‘communities of enquiry are more likely to succeed where participants share clear purposes and task focus’ (p. 2). The process that they report on was supported by an online ‘virtual research environment’ (VRE). The use of web-based platforms to support collaborative learning is growing in popularity, although it is not without its potential difficulties. Wilson et al. conclude that communities of enquiry ‘offer a new model for the generation of knowledge, linking research, policy and practice in novel and exciting ways’ (p. 6).

Using a virtual research/learning environment to facilitate collaborative working is of course not a prerequisite for collaborative learning, and indeed, is perhaps of most use where collaborators are geographically spread. In other projects the value of more local collaboration is noted. James, McCormick, and Marshall (2006) took the success of the Assessment for Learning model as the basis for exploring how teachers and pupils learn to learn in classrooms, in schools and in networks. They conclude that it is not sufficient to merely adopt some of the techniques, but that fundamental beliefs about learning need to be reassessed. This is mirrored in literature that focuses on teacher engagement in curriculum reform, that is, that in order to engage teachers in relevant professional learning, their existing knowledge, skills and values need to be acknowledged (Brain, Reid, and Comerford Boyes, 2006) and arguably accommodated. However, the culture of local contexts which were the unit of focus in James, McCormick, and Marshall’s work can serve either to support or to inhibit collaborative learning. James, McCormick, and Marshall found that while networks of learners were perceived to be valuable, it was acknowledged that these views are usually relatively subjective, and that the worth and value of particular networks tends to be perceived differently by people in different positions, possibly dependent on their prioritisation of the impact of the network on personal, social and occupational domains.

Fraser et al. (2007) concur with this view, arguing that effective CPD for teachers needs to attend not only to occupational needs, such as technical knowledge about what to teach, but should also take into account personal aspects (such as beliefs and values, interest and motivation) as well as social aspects relating to relationships and contexts. Fraser et al. (ibid.) argue that CPD which is based on collaborative enquiry and which allows teachers the space within this to reflect on and build their own knowledge about teaching and learning is most likely to lead to

transformational educational practice (as opposed to CPD which merely maintains the status quo).

So, collaborative learning in its various forms is deemed to be a positive form of CPD for teachers, attending to occupational, personal and social factors, all of which are crucial to effective professional learning. The literature also highlights key conditions for effective collaborative learning, including shared purpose and vision, an explicit focus on learning (as opposed to merely doing), and mutual trust and respect: purpose, focus and relationships. It is important also to acknowledge that the literature does not advocate collaborative learning in place of individual learning, but rather as a complementary approach.

Informal learning

Implicit in the discussion above on collaborative learning is the notion that working with colleagues can increase opportunities for learning and can also add to the enjoyment of the activity, taking into account occupational, personal and social dimensions, as highlighted earlier (Fraser et al. 2007). Many of the benefits of collaborative learning take place through what are often referred to as the 'informal' elements of learning, that is, the social interaction and the learning which results from that interaction. The extent to which informal learning is deliberative is an area of debate. For example, Gorard, Fevre, and Rees (1999) suggested that informal learning was deliberative learning, and that what made it informal was that it was 'non-taught', whereas more recent work tends to suggest that while informal learning can be deliberative, it can most certainly also be 'implicit, intuitive and incidental' (Turner 2006, 308). Reid's quadrants of teacher learning (Fraser et al. 2007) help us to illustrate these complexities by exploring the sphere of action in which the learning takes place using two intersecting spectra: formal – informal and incidental – planned. Eraut (2004) captures this spectrum by suggesting that informal learning can be deliberative, reactive or implicit.

This whole area is attracting increasing attention in the research community as researchers attempt to understand the conditions which contribute to effective informal learning in a deeper way, and increasingly, through empirical, school-focused research. McNally et al. (2004) warn that informal learning must not be misconstrued as 'some kind of casual and incidental, peripheral process' (p. 1), but rather that its power and potential should be recognised and acknowledged as something which is context dependent and deserving of as much attention as the more formal, structural elements of professional learning, such as the teacher induction scheme requirements for first year teachers in Scotland. They warn against the assumption that all professional learning can be 'managed', instead pleading for a view of professional learning which values the serendipitous as well as the planned and the formal. Fraser et al. (2007) also identify this as an important way of understanding professional learning, suggesting that effective learning for teachers can occur along a spectrum from formal to informal and from planned to incidental, arguing that there ought to be a balance of such opportunities. The message seems to be that informal learning should be acknowledged in addition to, and often alongside, more formal learning opportunities: 'it is important to resist polarising formal and informal learning as fundamentally distinct or in competition with one another' (McNally 2006, 79).

The growing recognition of the importance of informal learning is not unique to teaching and teachers, but to adult learners in general, particularly in professional contexts. It formed a central focus in the Teaching and Learning Research Programme

(TLRP) project carried out by Michael Eraut and colleagues which explored early career learning at work for accountants, engineers and nurses. Eraut (2004) argues that the concept of informal learning:

recognises the social significance of learning from other people, but implies greater scope for individual agency than socialisation. It draws attention to the learning that takes place in the spaces surrounding activities and events with a more overt formal purpose; and takes place in a much wider variety of settings than formal education or training. It can also be considered as a complementary partner to learning from experience, which is usually construed more in terms of personal than inter-personal learning. (p. 1)

He goes on to suggest four kinds of workplace activities in which learning can take place: participation in group activities; working alongside others; tackling challenging tasks; and working with clients (p. 20). However, it should not be presumed that because informal learning can take place in the workplace that such learning always necessarily reaches its potential. Effective informal learning necessarily involves collaboration with others, and here Eraut echoes the conclusions discussed under the ‘collaborative learning’ heading above, suggesting that: ‘a group climate for learning has to be created, sustained and recreated at regular intervals; and that where mutual learning is low and relationships are dominated by suspicion, this has to be a management responsibility’ (p. 21). This implies that school leaders must take responsibility for fostering a climate which will enable collaborative and informal learning, both planned and incidental, to thrive.

Policy context

The research reported here was carried out in Scotland, where the policy context reveals a growing focus on the importance of CPD, particularly in relation to the implementation of the current curriculum reform initiative, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) (LTS, 2006). CfE aims to promote autonomy, choice, responsibility and citizenship for pupils, and expects teachers to take local control of developments; developing curriculum within a national framework of pupil ‘experiences and outcomes’ to suit the local needs of their pupils. This arguably requires substantial professional autonomy, and would suggest that CPD ought to be focusing on transformative learning as opposed to transmissive learning for teachers (Kennedy 2005). In turn, for CPD to support transformative practice it arguably needs to contain a collaborative element, as individuals cannot easily effect transformative change on their own.

The current CPD framework, however, is based principally on a series of professional standards, against which teachers are required to show individual evidence of achievement (see Kennedy 2008 for more detail of the CPD policy framework). The standards based framework does not naturally support a collaborative approach to professional learning or indeed to professional practice in general (Grangeat and Gray 2008), and this presents a substantial challenge to the promotion of collaborative learning.

The projects

This paper draws on two empirical projects: ‘Teachers as learners in the context of continuing professional development’ – a project within the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS) in Scotland, and ‘Early Professional Development in

Scotland: Teachers in years 2-6' – a project led by members of the above AERS project team on behalf of Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS).

The AERS project sought to examine the conditions for effective continuing professional development for teachers by developing research instruments and establishing criteria for good practice, which can be applied at a range of different levels within the educational system. This paper draws on interviews with key informants (n=10) and with teachers selected because of their obvious engagement with CPD: 'CPD successes' (n=8). Key informants were drawn from stakeholder organisations with a role/interest in CPD, and included senior figures from within the following organisations:

- The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) – the professional body for teachers
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE)
- National CPD Team – set up after the McCrone Agreement to support development of CPD policy and practice
- Teachers' Agreement Communications Team (TACT) – responsible for the contractual aspects of the McCrone Agreement
- Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) – Lead organisation for curriculum development, sponsored by Scottish Government
- Subject Organisation
- CPD Provider and Researcher
- Primary Headteacher
- Professor of Education
- Local Authority Education Officer

The teachers identified as 'CPD successes' were all experienced teachers who had been drawn from a range of categories including those who were undertaking award-bearing CPD or who had been identified as engaging in CPD over and above what might generally be expected. (The key informant interview data is discussed in more detail in Kennedy, Christie, et al. 2008.)

The LTS project focused on the CPD needs of teachers in the post-induction phase – years 2-6 of their professional lives. It sought to explore year 2-6 teachers' CPD needs, the relative priority of these needs, their experiences of 'effective' CPD and their views on barriers to CPD. The year 2-6 teachers' views were then discussed with other stakeholders, resulting in a set of strategic recommendations. The research was undertaken in three phases: phase one consisted of ten nominal group technique interviews with 59 participants; phase two was an electronic survey which generated 667 useable responses; and phase three was a consultation exercise with stakeholders which generated 20 responses, through both face-to-face meetings and electronic communication. (Full details of the research are available in Kennedy, McKay, et al. 2008.)

The AERS project: data analysis, findings and discussion

The interviews were semi-structured, focusing on five key topic areas (see Appendix 1 for interview schedule). All interviews were transcribed verbatim and were then analysed at two levels. Stage one of the analysis involved individual team members adopting a grounded approach to the identification of key issues arising through the transcripts. Individual transcripts and emerging themes were then shared through the virtual research environment (VRE) and the whole team met to discuss and develop a composite list of emergent issues.

The interview data are discussed under three main themes: interviewees' perceptions of the current situation with reference to collaborative learning; their aspirations in relation to collaborative professional learning; and their views of the barriers to collaborative learning. In the original project analysis, these three themes had been identified as described in the above process, but without specific reference to collaborative CPD. Analysis for this paper involved reanalysing the existing data in a thematic way, looking for all mentions (explicit or implicit) of collaborative CPD under the three themes listed above.

The current situation

The interviewees portray a view that collaborative learning is becoming more popular:

'I guess one could say that you could see a movement towards more collaborative learning in schools, there is less closing of classroom doors, there's more engagement collectively...' (KI-1)

However, there is also a recognition that the extent of collaborative learning activity varies across schools and local authorities:

'I think one is aware of some schools that really have become a learning community and others that have not.' (KI-1)

One of the key informant interviewees puts this down to a gradual cultural change, drawing parallels between pedagogy in school with children and that used with adult professional learners:

'One of the problems we've had is that yes, we expect children and young people to learn in that way [collaboratively] but we don't want to do the same with adults. So we see the benefits of group-working, paired working, peer assessment... for children, but we don't see the benefits for adults... that's part of the cultural shift.' (KI-2)

This suggests that while the concept of collaborative learning and associated philosophy of socially-situated learning is increasingly prevalent in primary and secondary school classrooms, the social element of teacher professional learning is perhaps not yet valued to the same extent as occupational learning or 'training'.

While most of the interviewees were able to give examples of collaborative professional learning currently taking place in schools, their descriptions suggested different views on what constitutes 'collaboration'. These views ranged from:

'As a teacher that's how I learned; I learned by sitting in the staffroom listening to wiser colleagues talk about their experiences and being advised, you know, "I'd think twice before doing that" and "you might want to try this", you know. I mean that's how teachers have always learned to be good teachers.' (KI-3)

to

'... it was having a kind of transformative effect on the culture of the school so that people were starting to ask questions that demonstrated that the school was indeed becoming a professional learning community.' (KI-1).

The first quote above suggests a rather transmissive form of collaborative learning, if indeed it can be classified as collaborative, which takes place during one individual episode, whereas the second example suggests a dynamic and transformative collaboration over a period of time. This tension is raised explicitly by one of the teacher interviewees who observes that ‘co-operation is not necessarily collaboration’. (T-1)

This range of understandings of collaboration can be broadly categorised under 3 different levels as outlined in Table 2. below:

[Insert Table 2 here]

It is perhaps useful to draw parallels between the above spectrum of engagement in collaborative CPD and Kennedy’s (2005) framework for analysing CPD which suggests a spectrum ranging from transmissive activities to transformative activities, along which the capacity for professional autonomy and transformative practice is increased. For example, collaborative activity at level 1 suggests activities where teachers are co-located but not necessarily interacting, a common scenario when information or ‘facts’ are being transmitted (transmissive CPD). Level 3 engagement, on the other hand, suggests engagement with issues of context, values and action which are more likely to result in dynamic, progressive and potentially transformative practice. This is particularly the case if the activity is sustained over a period of time which is much more likely in level 3 engagement than in level 1 engagement.

In some of the interviews collaborative CPD was equated with informal learning, but usually as an adjunct to a formal activity, for example, chatting over coffee during an in-service course. This goes against much recent research which suggests that informal learning is an important part of professional learning and not something that should be seen merely as a by-product of formal activities (Eraut 2004; McNally et al. 2004). The range of collaborative activity and the varied levels of awareness of the value of such activity suggest a need for more explicit discussion of the value and practice of collaborative CPD.

Aspirations and opportunities

Interviewees suggested that collaborative learning was currently ad-hoc but expressed hope that it would be a much more systematic and integral aspect of professional learning in the future:

‘To what extent do I feel that teachers genuinely engage in collaborative learning? Very little, and again, it’s something that I feel is absolutely vital.’ (T-2)

Some identified the importance of relationships in ensuring that schools were supportive of collaborative learning:

‘It’s about respect and behaviours and attitudes between staff and that is quite a tricky thing to foster’ (KI-4).

This echoes research findings discussed earlier which highlight the centrality of good relationships in effective learning communities (Bolam et al. 2005), and crucially, acknowledges the challenge of the task of ensuring good relationships in all schools (Eraut 2004). There are clear implications here for the development of

leadership capacity in schools. The importance attached to good relationships also supports a move towards recognising the socially-situated nature of collaborative learning, focusing on social and personal aspects as well as occupational aspects of professional learning (Bell and Gilbert 1996).

Linking to the notion of good relationships is the desire expressed by some of the interviewees for more effective and regular peer review. One of the key informant interviewees expressed an aspiration that this to become a more prominent feature within initial teacher education:

‘one of the things that initial teacher education did was to change teachers’ perspectives on lifelong learning, maybe initial teacher education can change perspectives about peer review, if that were to become an aspect of activity that students had experience of.’ (KI-3)

Another of the teacher interviewees, one of the teachers, was explicit about her aspiration for processes that allow teachers to learn from observing each other teaching to become embedded in schools. However, on this point it is worth raising a note of caution in relation to the level of collaborative engagement needed in this process in order for learning to be effective: it is not sufficient for teachers merely to be in the same room as another teacher (level 1 engagement), there arguably needs to be a much more engaged relationship between the observed and the observer, where shared interests and problems are identified and explored (level 3 engagement).

Another process which was identified by interviewees as a means through which more effective collaborative learning might be supported was the Professional Review and Development process (PRD) (see SEED 2003). However, it should be acknowledged that the PRD process can only be as good as the people taking part in it, and therefore the role of the reviewers is crucial. Reviewers must arguably have a good knowledge of the power of socially-situated learning and have the interpersonal skills to be able to work with reviewees to create effective learning plans which involve collaborative learning activities. Again, this highlights implications for the leadership of teacher learning in schools.

Barriers

Despite overwhelming support for a move towards more sustained and embedded collaborative learning in schools, interviewees expressed concerns about potential barriers to achieving this aspiration.

A major concern related to structural barriers such as secondary subject ‘silos’ and timetable issues. However, there are also cultural issues related to these so-called structural barriers. For example, one of the key informant interviewees highlighted the difficulty for teachers in having non-class contact time together to work collaboratively. However, he also reported that many headteachers describe their staff as holding a view that the non-contact time is ‘their time’ to do individual marking and preparation rather than to engage in collaborative activities (KI-2), indicating a cultural element to what has perhaps been seen as a purely structural barrier.

One of the interviewees, a primary school headteacher, also spoke about the difficulty in finding ‘suitable topics for that purpose [collaborative activity]’ (KI-5). This could arguably suggest a somewhat narrow view of collaborative engagement, and perhaps hints at an approach which is driven by the headteacher rather than by the concerns of the staff in question. Staff having a shared vision and shared purpose for collaborative activity has been identified as a prerequisite for successful learning

communities (Bolam et al. 2005; Wilson et al. 2008). However, if the headteacher's identification of 'suitable topics' is based on the personal and occupational needs of the staff then it may well serve as an enabling factor in relation to collaborative learning. This calls for more awareness-raising in schools, local authorities and teacher education providers of the value of collaborative learning and the means by which that value can be maximised.

Another potentially important barrier, but one that was mentioned explicitly by only two of the interviewees, was the linking of notions of collaborative learning with e-learning, and the perceived negative disposition towards collaborative e-learning held by many teachers. While quite clearly collaborative activity can be successfully undertaken electronically (see for example, Wilson et al. 2008), the interviewees pointed out that there are many people who prefer face-to-face collaboration due to negative experiences with electronic collaborative activity. In addition, it was noted that for many teachers, the 'informal' element (networking with other teachers) within 'formal' learning experiences (courses) is seen as part of the attraction of attending organised learning activities. This suggests that the different elements of such activities perhaps need to be given more equal value and status, that is, rather than viewing a course as simply a formal/planned event, the incidental learning opportunities should also be seen as central to its impact.

More general points about teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning were mentioned by several of the other interviewees, with a view expressed that perhaps the 'system' discourages teachers from valuing collaborative learning activity:

'I think they [teachers] do value the more conventional approaches actually, but I think that's because it may be perceived that that's what's expected of them, or that's what's valued externally... and the system itself hasn't actually put enough value on the alternatives of other kinds of experiences'. (KI-3)

This point is further explored by an interviewee from the General Teaching Council for Scotland who suggests that the importance of collaborative learning has perhaps not been communicated clearly enough to teachers, and that it

'hasn't been connected to standards, for example, the Standard for Full Registration' (KI-6).

This suggests that the formal policy context, in terms of both the written documentation and guidance given about its implementation, needs to take account of a wider view of teacher learning than the individualised focus that currently appears to dominate.

The LTS project: data analysis, findings and discussion

The data from the LTS is drawn principally from survey respondents' comments in response to a question about their experiences of effective CPD: 'Please describe CPD that you have undertaken that you consider to have been effective. What was the focus on, what form did it take and what was particularly effective about it?' The question was open-ended and elicited 501 responses from the 667 year 2-6 teachers who completed the survey. Of these 501 responses 32 made explicit mention of CPD activities which had involved collaboration of some kind. Not all respondents used the term 'collaborative' but the responses made reference to activities such as informal networking, working with peers, mentoring and group learning.

The 32 responses were analysed in relation to Reid's quadrants of teacher learning (Fraser et al. 2007) which is shown in Figure 1 below, with exemplification for each quadrant:

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Of the 32 responses 16 were classified as formal/planned activities, 10 as formal/incidental activities and 6 as informal/planned activities. No responses were categorised as informal/incidental. See Figure 2 below for diagrammatic representation:

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Two initial observations can be made. First, that only 32 of the 501 comments referred explicitly to activities that could be classified as being collaborative suggests that the majority of the year 2-6 teachers' experiences of successful CPD focused on the individual element of the activities undertaken. This does not necessarily mean that the activities they highlighted as being effective did not contain a collaborative element, but rather that their descriptions of the effectiveness did not focus on this. This could in part be explained by the focus during initial teacher education and the induction year on individual achievement against prescribed standards of competence, or indeed might reflect the point made in the AERS project interviews above that teachers have been given the message that collaborative learning is not valued by the system as much as other more conventional forms of learning.

Second, the focus of the vast majority of comments which did relate to collaborative CPD activity was almost exclusively on formal activities and on formal, planned activities in particular. Again, this does not necessarily indicate that informal/incidental activities did not take place, nor that they were ineffective, but rather that the survey respondents did not highlight them. This might suggest that the year 2-6 teachers' views of what constitutes CPD are related to the more formal activities arranged by schools, local authorities and external providers, and not the kinds of activities that they undertake themselves in informal and ad-hoc ways. Given that many of the benefits of collaborative learning are to be found within the personal and social domains, and the majority of formal CPD opportunities are focused on the occupational domain, that is the knowledge needed to do the job of teaching, then this suggests an imbalanced conception of the purpose and value of CPD. It is worth returning to McNally et al's (2004) warning that informal learning must not be considered merely to be some kind of 'causal and incidental, peripheral process' (p. 1).

Eraut (2004) argues that effective informal learning necessarily implies collaboration with others, and this is evident in some of the statements from the survey respondents, many of whom identified the social, inter-personal element of formal activities as contributing to the effectiveness of the activity:

Relaxed and informal courses where the course leader led the meeting but allowed time for discussion.

... good interaction and learning from other teachers on the course in an informal setting.

There was an opportunity to chat informally which was very informative...

... Small groups and networking with other teachers.

It seems that many of the examples of effective CPD which involved collaboration cited by the year 2-6 teachers were individual one-off activities, whereas Cordingley et al., (2005) suggest that the most effective CPD is both collaborative and sustained. Some of the survey responses did refer to activities which were ongoing, for example, school working groups and cross-authority subject group meetings, but many of these activities, while not one-offs, did not involve work on a sustained project over a period of time. One example of sustained and collaborative CPD came from a teacher who described being involved in an Assessment is for Learning project in his/her school, commenting that 'it was effective because it was conducted over a whole year'.

While all 32 of the comments identified convey something about the value or effectiveness of some form of collaboration with others, the extent of collaborative engagement varies. It ranges from merely undertaking CPD activities beside other teachers, to engaging with them on shared projects of interest. This range reflects the levels of engagement illustrated in Table II above, and suggests a challenge for the profession in coming to a common understanding of the role, purpose, value and shape of collaborative professional learning.

Concluding comments

The evidence from key informants and teachers discussed above suggests a wide variation in understandings of collaborative learning, as reflected in Table II earlier in the paper. In terms of relating this research evidence to practice, what is important is gaining an understanding of how individual teachers move along the spectrum from level 1 engagement, or co-location, to level 3 engagement which implies genuine collaboration and potentially more transformative practice.

The link between informal learning and collaborative learning seems central to the effectiveness of collaborative learning, and there is therefore a need to adopt a conception of collaborative learning which allows for formal, informal, planned and incidental learning. These different spheres of professional learning need to be given equal value where informal elements within planned, formal activities are not viewed as co-incidental and peripheral by-products of formal activity. Paradoxically, however, if informal learning opportunities are in some way 'planned' then do they cease to be informal, and does this mean that the benefits accruing from informal learning are thereby reduced?

Rather than attempting to plan informal or incidental learning opportunities it is perhaps useful to think in terms of 'enabling factors', some of which might be formal and structural, but some of which might be informal and cultural, such as prioritisation of a school culture which is supportive of professional learning (Eraut 2004). This has clear implications, as highlighted in the earlier discussion, for school leadership of teacher learning.

The triple-lens framework is a useful tool for considering the factors which might contribute to a teacher's effective engagement in collaborative learning, as well as consideration of the balance of collaborative learning compared to other forms of professional learning. That is, that teachers and their professional learning peers or mentors could usefully consider the extent to which any professional learning activity supports the personal, the social and the occupational domain (Bell and Gilbert 1996); the extent to which the professional learning activity results in transmissive learning or in transformative action and increased professional autonomy (Kennedy 2005); and the sphere of action in which professional learning takes place (Reid's quadrants of

professional learning). Attention needs to be paid to the contextualisation of individual learning opportunities and to the overall balance of a teacher's learning experience over a period of time, and again, reference to the triple-lens framework is helpful here.

While the research discussed and reported here suggests that a greater balance of forms and purpose of CPD is desirable, the policy context within which Scottish teachers currently work focuses on an individualised, standards-based framework; a situation to be found in many countries worldwide. There are clearly tensions here surrounding the extent to which collaborative and informal learning is perceived as valuable and can be accounted for within such a framework.

A number of implications for practice have been highlighted in this paper, but the research reported here also points towards potential areas for future research: in particular, the difficulty in identifying the extent to which teachers engage in collaborative CPD is worthy of further exploration. The studies reported here suggest that teachers do not necessarily have a clear notion of what constitutes collaborative CPD but also suggests that the system influences teachers in such a way as to ensure that more formal forms of CPD are privileged.

The present studies also suggest that further research into school leaders' capacity to lead teacher learning, in addition to pupil learning, would also be most welcome.

I conclude, however, by suggesting that not all professional learning can or should be formally accounted for – there is a requirement for professional trust in order that the benefits of collaborative, informal and incidental learning are not lost in an attempt to formalise and individualise them.

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Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview schedule – Key informant interviews

UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS AS LEARNERS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 1. Teacher professional learning:**
 - 1.1 Are teachers professionals? In what ways?
 - 1.2 How do you think teachers learn?
 - 1.3 Why do you think teachers' learning is important?
 - 1.4 Why is learning important in a professional context?
 - 1.5 What do you understand by 'professional learning'?
- 2. Forms of professional learning:**
 - 2.1 What kinds of opportunities do you think teachers have to undertake professional learning?
 - 2.2 Which of these do you think are more/less valuable?
 - 2.3 Why?
 - 2.4 What kinds of opportunities do you think teachers value?
 - 2.5 Why?
 - 2.6 To what extent are teachers' professional needs and aspirations currently realised?
- 3. Schools:**
 - 3.1 To what extent do you think that teachers' learning takes place in schools?
 - 3.2 To what extent do you feel teachers engage in collaborative learning?
 - 3.3 To what extent do you think that schools can be considered as 3.4 professional learning communities?
 - 3.5 What do you think this entails?
 - 3.6 How might schools work together to enhance professional learning?
- 4. Future???**
 - 4.1 How would you like to see teachers' professional learning develop in the future?
 - 4.1 In what ways do you feel you/your organisation may contribute to this?
- 5. Is there anything you feel we have not discussed which important in this area?**

Framework	Terms of categorisation	What is being categorised?
1. Bell and Gilbert's aspects of professional learning (amended)	Personal/social/occupational	Domain of influence of professional learning
2. Kennedy's framework for analysing CPD	Transmission/transitional/transformation	Capacity for professional autonomy and transformative practice supported by the professional learning
3. Quadrants of teacher learning	Formal/informal Planned/incidental	Sphere of action in which the professional learning takes place

Table 1. Summary of triple lens framework

Level	Type of engagement	Extent of shared concern	Exemplification
1	Being beside others (<i>Co-location</i>)	Common location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colleagues in a staffroom • Participants at an in-service course
2	Talking with others (<i>Co-operation</i>)	Common interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage partners (primary) or subject teachers (secondary) discussing curriculum
3	Engaging with others (<i>Collaboration</i>)	Common problem or task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colleagues involved in school-based action research project to address a shared problem

Table 2. Levels of engagement in collaborative CPD

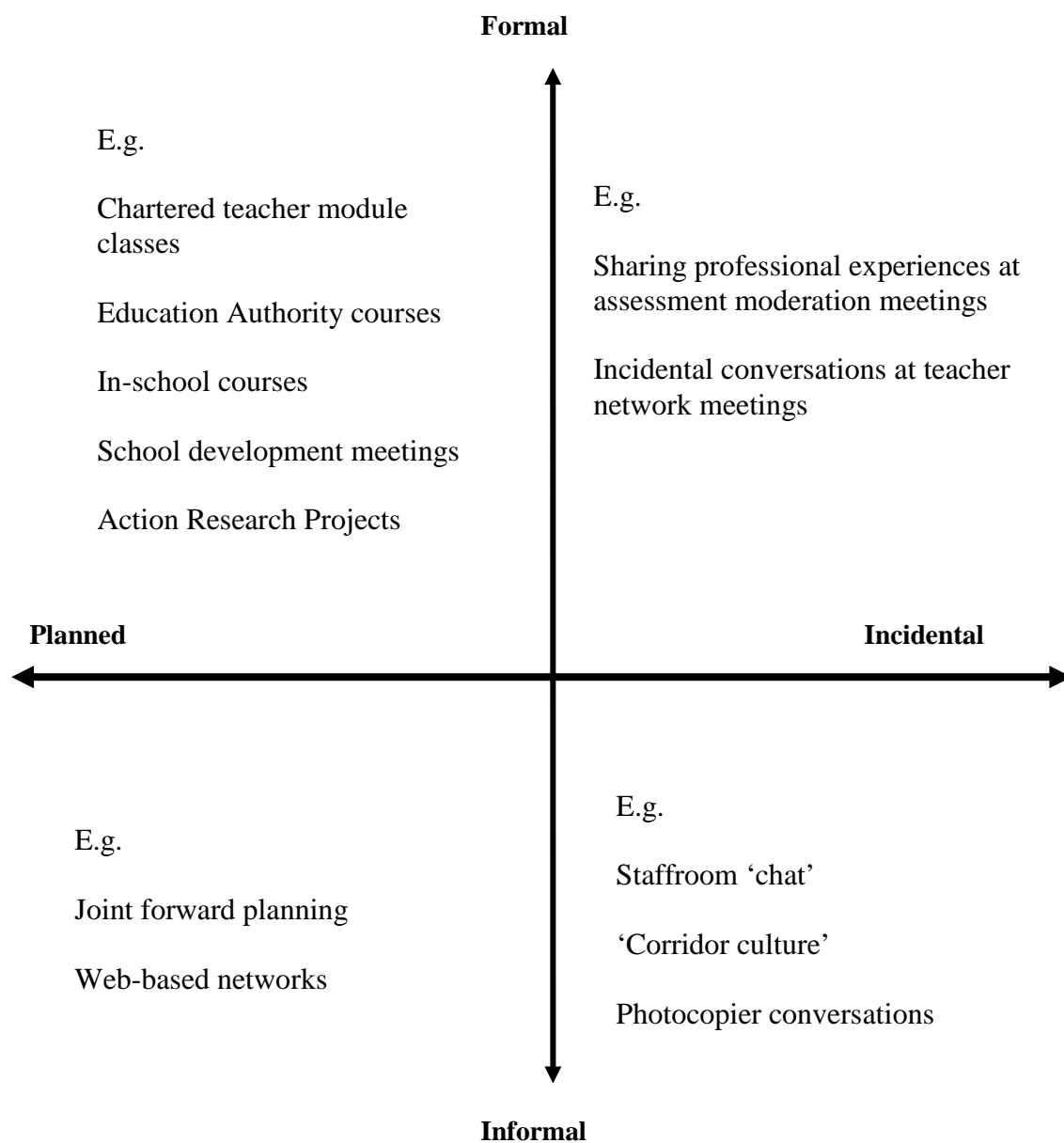


Figure 1. Reid's quadrants of teacher learning

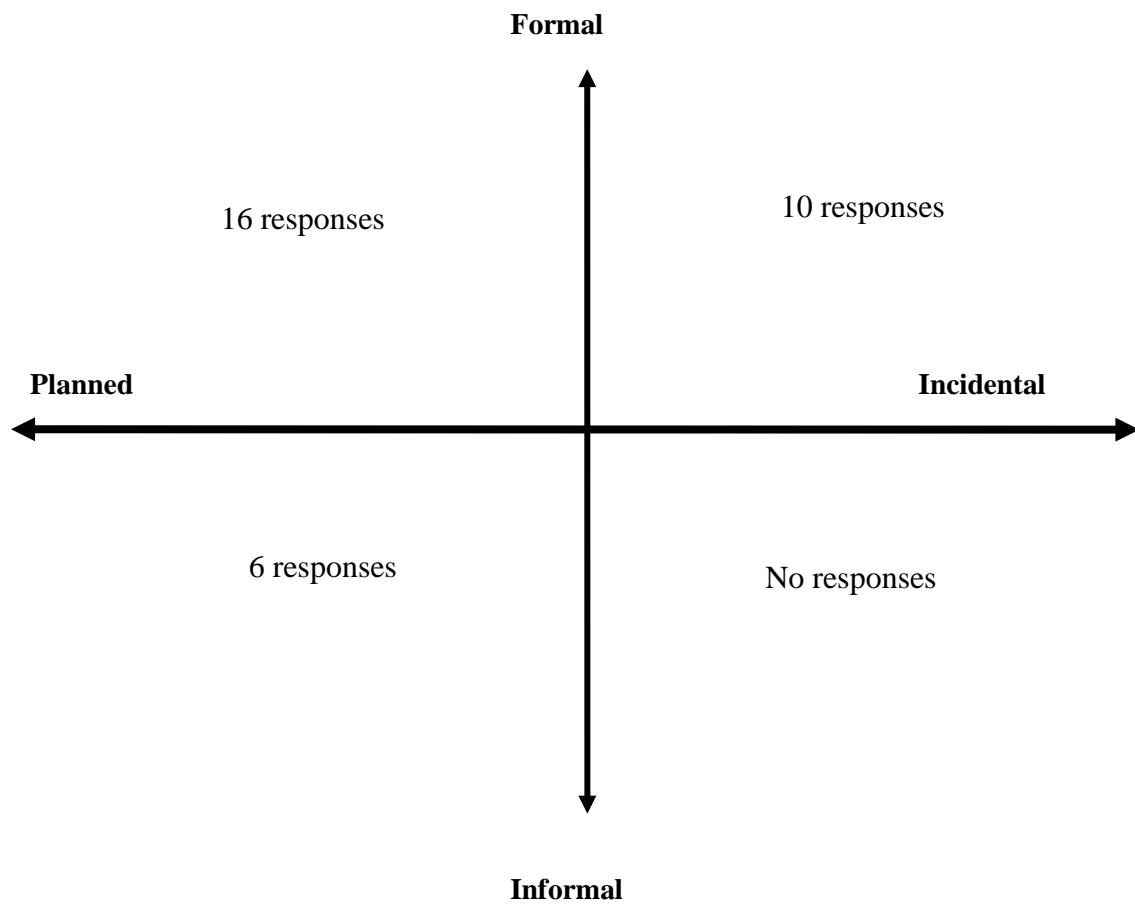


Figure 2. Responses from year 2-6 teacher survey on effective CPD

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